GWIDDE

(Quinces)

By RAYMOND E. HOLLENBACH

A traveller through our Pennsylvania German country during the fall of the year is impressed by the fine commercial orchards laden with beautiful, luscious fruit. The old-timer, however, has a nostalgic feeling for the farm orchards which have almost entirely disappeared and for the lesser fruit trees — the crab apples, the pears, the plums and the quinces—which no longer shade the yard between the house and the barn.

Quinces — **Gwidde!** What would **fasnacht** be without **a** good supply of **gwiddehunnich** to eat with **die fasnacht kuche!**

Just why a fruit that is one of the oldest known to our civilization, and one that up to a few years ago was one of the most important, should have almost disappeared is hard to understand. Perhaps it is because the quince is hardly ever eaten raw and in our modern way of living there is not much use for it now that home preserving is rapidly reaching the vanishing point. Several years ago when it seemed that the last source of supply in our neighborhood was gone I found, after some search, that they were still available at the Reading Terminal Market but at a price of ten to fifteen cents each. Fortunately, since then we have found a surviving tree in a neglected corner of our own property, and this year the crop is exceptionally good.

For the city dweller and those who no longer remember what a quince tree looks like, there is no better description than that of Parkinson in his beautiful old garden book, Paradisi in Sole (1629):

"The Quince Tree groweth oftentimes to the height and bigenesse of a good Apple Tree, but more usually lower, with crooked and spreading armes and branches farre abroad; the leaves are somewhat round, and like the leaves of the Apple Tree, but thicker, harder, fuller of veines, and white on the underside: the blossomes or flowers are white, now and then dasht over with blush, being large and open, like unto a single Rose: the fruit followeth, which when it is ripe is yellow, and covered with a white cotton or freeze, which in the younger is thicker and more plentiful, but waxeth lesse and lesse, as the fruit ripeneth."

The origin of the quince is lost in antiquity, but it is generally believed to have been native to the island of Crete, whence its scientific name, **Cydonia**, after the town of Cydon on that island. The quince is mentioned in mythology and in ancient Greece the bride always ate quince at her wedding party and all through the Middle Ages quinces were used at wedding feasts. To dream of quinces was believed "to be favorable to the dreamer, denoting speedy release from sickness, troubles, etc."

Quinces were mentioned in France early in the 13th Century and the English poet, Chaucer, in "Romaunt of the Rose," which is a translation from the French, wrote

"Many homely trees ther were
That Peches, Coyns and Apples bere."

The name "coyn" is an old English word for quince. Quinces were also mentioned in England as early as 1286 by the fruit gardener to King Edward, the First. However, Loudon, a noted English authority on gardening, said they were never "very generally cultivated in England." We must therefore look to Germany for the once great popularity of this fruit in Pennsylvania.

The old herbalists rarely looked upon any plant or fruit except from the standpoint of health, so when they mention quinces as food they must have been important. **Bock** said, "Es werden die Quitten zu der Speiz und Artzney bey armen unn reichen fast gelobt." Matthiolus added a note about the proper time for harvesting them — "die Quitten sol man abschuettelen und sammlen so sie eine goldfarbe gewinnen." The golden yellow of the quince was so well-known that **gwiddegoldegeel** was a common description of bright yellow and the expression **es is gwiddegeel** is still frequently heard among older people. Rhagor, a Swiss gardener (1650), considered quinces next in importance to apples and pears and in some respects more important, especially as pertains to medicine.

The old books contain scores of prescriptions and recipes for using quinces. "Adlichen Land und Feld Leben" (Nurnberg 1687) contains **four whole chapters** about what a housewife should know about using quinces. Brauner's Kraeuterbuch (Frankfurt 1728), a copy of which was found in an old Maxatawny attic, contains all the uses mentioned by Brendle and Unger in "Folk Medicine of the Pennsylvania Germans." About the only medical use that has survived to modern times is the use of the mucilaginous liquid obtained by soaking quince seeds in water as an eye wash. In some places this prescription is changed and calls for the use of the blossom, fresh or dried, instead of the seeds. One prescription frequently mentioned is the use of baked or roasted quince for relieving a hangover.

"So jemands einen steiffen Trunck hett gethan und besorgte dasz ihm der starcke geruch vom Wein zu viel in has Haupt moechte dempffen der esse alsbald gebratene Quitten so schadet ihm der Wein desto weniger."

Another common use was that of preserved quinces — **eingemachten Quitten.** Brauner, mentioned above, said such quinces "dienen dem Magen." Saur's almanac contained a recipe for preserving quinces, cut up into small pieces, with cinnamon, cloves, alspice and ginger. Hark and Barba's "Pennsylvania German Cookery" contains a similar recipe. In our own home, Mrs. Hollenbach's mother made such preserved quinces up to her last years, but to my taste they were only justified if they were actually "good for the stomach."

Any number of recent cook books still contain recipes for making quince jelly, and this product, ready made, is found on the grocery shelf. The "de luxe" product of quinces is the already mentioned **gwiddehunnich** — quince honey, quince jam, quince marmalade — it is delicious by whatever name you call it. For a recipe the reader is referred to Hark and Barba's book. This recipe, with small variations, is found in many books back to the middle of the sixteenth century. The older books call it a "latwerge" which is not only "wolschmeckend" but which is also good for you.

Quinces were also used to make a cordial and a wine. An Eighteenth Century book published in London said, "In North America they make a wine or liquor of the fruit called quince-drink, and likewise draw a pleasant and grateful spirit from it." An old German farmer's almanac recommends quince wine as good for your health:

"Geisz-Milch, Kaesz und reif Obst isz,

Des Quitten Weins auch nich vergisz"

In addition to all these uses of the fruit, the tree, although generally small is also useful. Quince wood is hard and close grained and is greatly esteemed by the wood turner. Is it any wonder that the tree was so popular and so generally grown? As late as 1883, Walter F. Dreibelbis, in his travel diary, mentioned a quince orchard several rows wide and a mile long along the Juniata River in Pennsylvania. It is strange indeed that a tree once so universally esteemed is now almost entirely neglected.

There is one more use for the quince, which also dates back to another century, but which is not mentioned by the herbalists. Perhaps it was out of their province or perhaps they disdained writing about anything that suggested an improvement on nature. Long before anyone heard of "home permanents," ladies were making curls, called "spitties," by using the muculaginous liquid gotten by shaking quince seed in a small quantity of water. The curls were not so permanent but the supply was. Ladies, why not get your husband to plant a quince tree in the back yard!

Royersford
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der Mann widder runner kumme deet." Der Professor hot gsaat: "Sell 'pass't. Du kannscht geh."

Es gebt deel Leit, die sin arrig enghazich. Sie hen en Noschen, niemand waer recht, wann er net glaabt un denkt wie sie. Es gebt deel Sekte wu meene es kennt niemand seelich warre except die Leit wu zu ihre Sekt geheere. En gewisser Mann vun so ere Sekt hot emol en Geschpraech ghatt mit me Reffemierte Parre. Der Parre hot endlich gsaat: "Mei Freind, denkscht du net Gott hot en groosser mistake gemacht?" — "Ei, fer was dann?" frogt der Sekte Mann. Die Antwatt waar: "Weil er so en groosser Himmel gemacht hot fer eier kleeni Sekt."

Viel Leit glaawe net, dass es notwennich iss fer Parre Lanning zu hawwe. Dohaer kummt es, dass es in deel Sekte viel Parre gebt, die en schwachi Lanning hen un ihr Gebreddich iss aa dernooch. So en Parre hot en Breddich gehalte un am End hot er noch eppes saagge wolle, awwer er hot es vergesse ghatt, do hot er gsaat: "Ich hab noch eppes saagge wolle, awwer es iss mir weggerutscht."

Deel Leit behaapte die Aerd waer rund un deet sich alle 24 Schtunn gans rumdrehe. Ich weess net wie sell iss, awwer so saagge die Leit wu groossi Buchlanning hen. Die Mammi glaabt sell awwer net. Sie saagt, wann sell so waer un die Aerd deet sich rum drehe, dann deede doch unser Millichheffe umfalle. Ich muss geschteh, der Mammi ihr argument iss zimmlich schtarrig.

In Bucks Caunty hot der Parre Hess emoll gebreddicht. Eens vun de Zuheerer waar halwer eigschlofe. Wie der Parre en gewissi Bemerkung gemacht hot, saagt der Schleefer laut: "Sell iss so!" Die Leit hen all gelacht.

Kazlich hot en Parre arrig scharref losgedunnert iwwer en Geeggeschtand. Eens vun de Glieder hot sich hatt gedroffe gfiehlt. Er schteht uff in der Gemee un ruft laut: "Parre, meenscht du mich?"

Told by Daniel Miller in his Collection of Pennsylvania German Productions in Poetry and Prose, Reading, Pa. 1904.

GWIDDE HUNNICH

(Quince Honey)

3 large quinces
1 pound sugar
2 cups water

Grate the unpared quinces. Combine sugar and water and bring to a boil. When sugar is dissolved, add quinces and boil for 20 minutes. Pour into hot sterilized glasses and seal with paraffin.

GWIDDE GAARTSCHEL

(Quince Cordial)

1 pint quince juice
1¼ pounds sugar
¼ ounce cinnamon stick
1 quart brandy

Combine quince juice, sugar, and cinnamon stick and bring to a oil. Remove cinnamon stick and pour boiling mixture into brandy. Filter and bottle.

For further recipes see PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN COOKERY. A Regional Cookbook by Ann Hark and Preston A. Barba. Schlechters, Allentown, Pa.